

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

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OPEN LETTER TO CLIFTON FADIMAN

Dear Mr. Fadiman:

I know full well you didn't mean what you said at the meeting of the P.E.N. last night; in fact, in the heat of argument last night a lot of people said things they never believed and never will. Still, you did touch off a fuse that resulted in the biggest forensic explosion the P.E.N. Club has ever felt. I am not going to criticize you for creating that explosion, because you brought more life to the P.E.N. than it has seen in years (although I do think you ought to be a little more careful in what you say in public, however great the provocation). But you unwittingly and unintentionally played into the hands of a school of thought that seems to be gaining ground in the last few months, a school of thought representing a great potential danger.

Let us see what that school of thought represents. It represents, to begin with, the idea that all Germans are alike, that there is something in the physiological makeup of the German people that prevents them from living as civilized human beings. Some otherwise learned individuals have even propounded in all seriousness the theory that the German cranium is different from the craniums of other peoples, and that we are dealing here with a strange human species representing a problem that can be solved only by outright extermination.

According to the same idea, militarism and barbarism are boiling in the blood of every German, and have been boiling there for two thousand years.

This, then, is an indictment against a whole people and the whole of their history, regarding the Germans as an entity. In short, it is the same preposterous argument of racialism unleashed by the Nazis, applied to the Germans themselves. This may be considered poetic justice, but the general theory is as preposterous when turned

in one direction as in another. Regarding any people as an entity is dangerous. I am reminded of that astounding article by Mr. Albert Jay Nock in the *Atlantic Monthly* about a year ago. Mr. Nock demonstrated a unique kind of ouijaboard anthropology in his pontifications upon racial theories. He proclaimed it was impossible for Jews and Gentiles ever to get together or understand each other because there was, seemingly, a chemical antagonism between the two. Nock used a geographical term—Oriental—and arbitrarily pinned it on all Jews; then he took another geographical term—Occidental—and arbitrarily pinned it upon all Gentiles. No one apparently told him that even the Germans came from the Orient—using the Orient in the same incorrect sense as he had. Geography, religion, prejudice—with the emphasis upon the latter—got all tangled up and Albert Jay Nock along with them. He was trying to argue problems of anthropology but never once was that science involved in his story. All that counted apparently was that Mr. Nock was able to construct his two incredible entities and array them against each other.

This nonsense we are hearing today about the German people as an entity is the Nock argument pointed in a different direction. Of course, there are big, black blotches in Germany's history—long, ugly stretches of mass cruelty and barbarism. But there are also some pretty fair stretches. When you think of Goethe, Heine, Beethoven, Luther, Schiller, Fichte, Schurz, Maeterlinck, the Manns, Feuchtwanger, Zweig, Werfel, and countless others, you find it hard to think of fire-eating, rip-snorting militarists. People just don't turn ferocious or militaristic because it is in their blood. The Spartans were originally among the most creative and poetic of Greek peoples, but they lived inland, and squabbles

over border rights lead to militarism. So they developed what we know as the Spartan tradition. But militarism wasn't a matter of blood with them anymore than it is a matter of blood with anyone else, including the Germans, unless you are to say that biological distinctions to favor their own politics—are correct. Certainly, people are all black, anymore than we are all white. In fact, one of the troubles with this black-and-white business is that it hurts us even more than it does the enemy. It leads to the same superiority complex, the same untouchable complex that has brought misery to so many millions all over the world. This complex will be a deadly suction upon our ability to rebuild a world that will have room for men of good will and for the spirit of free and scientific enquiry, without which civilized progress is not only unlikely but impossible.

It is natural enough, under the strain of war and the fever war generates, to grasp at any doctrine leveled against the enemy. But let us at least recognize the danger of thinking we are erecting a battering ram against the enemy only to discover we have fashioned a full-length mirror. The size of our democracy will be measured not only by what we say now but what we do now, no less than what we said and did eighty years ago and one hundred and sixty years ago.

Please don't think I am putting you in the position of not believing this just as much as I do. In fact, I have said nothing you wouldn't say yourself and say much better. But I did want to call you to account for your carelessness in allowing yourself to be identified, in the heat of argument, with a school of thought to which you do not belong, and which you couldn't get into if you tried.

N. C.

The Unfulfilling Brightnesses

By Kenneth Patchen

THY servant I am
Immortal are thy lion-drunk deeps

As a flower thinks
So am I one with thee

Thou art my acquaintance
In the unlevel light

I am falling to sleep
In thy slaying forms

Where goeth the white wind
I have been
And believe

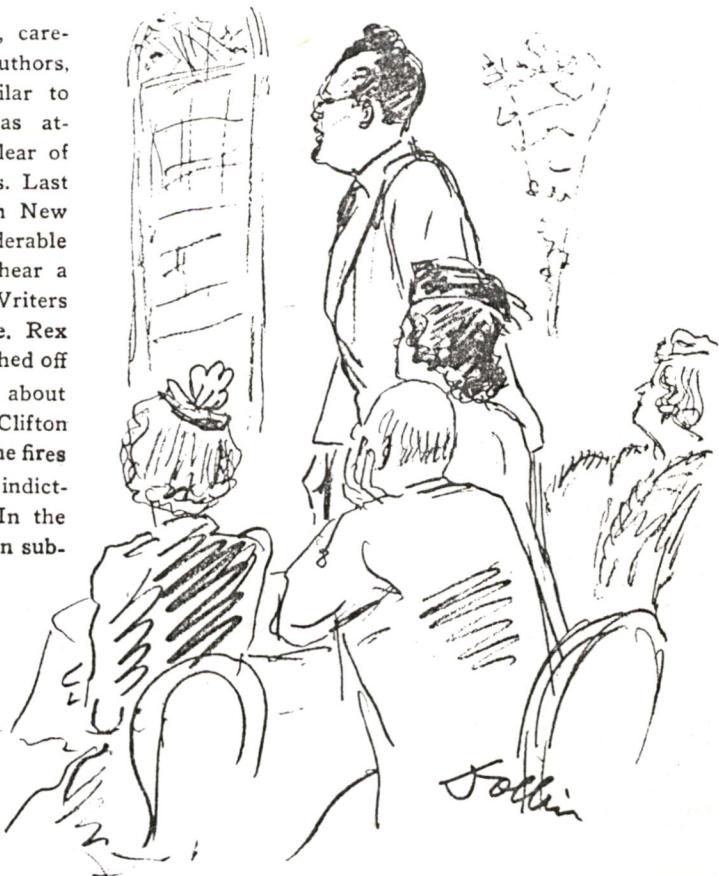
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Nov. 7, 1942

The P. E. N. Hears A Report from the W. W. B.

Split-second Sketches by B. Dolbin of Speakers at the Dinner Meeting of the P.E.N. Club, Oct. 28, 1942

THE P.E.N. Club is a compact, carefully governed organization of authors, editors, and publishers. It is similar to other professional groups and has attempted for many years to steer clear of political and controversial questions. Last week, at the Hotel Ambassador in New York, the lid was lifted with considerable emphasis. The members came to hear a report on the activities of the Writers War Board and remained to argue. Rex Stout, president of the W.W.B., touched off a running debate when he talked about the need for a propaganda of hate. Clifton Fadiman, also of the W.W.B., kept the fires going when he drew a sweeping indictment against the German people. In the midst of all this, Ben Lucien Burman submitted a resolution strongly disapproving the letter by the editors of Life to the British people—and the resolution passed by a good majority. Otherwise the meeting passed without incident. The sketches on this page are by the famed European artist, B. Dolbin.



Rex Stout: "There are atrocities in this war—plenty of them—but too many people think that they are mere inventions. I've seen the factual evidence and the sooner we become realistic about what is going on, the better."

Clifton Fadiman: "The murder of Lidice is a promise that everyone in this room will die if Germany wins. . . . The only way to make a German understand is to kill him, and even then he doesn't get the point."



Manuel Komroff (left): "We have been trying—and with a fair measure of success—to enlist the aid of the exiled writer in America, as well as to be of some help to him."



Carl Carmer (right): "Up in Canada, they needed bombardiers for the Air Force. We got Paul Gallico to do a yarn on bombardiers and for a month Canada got almost nothing except bombardiers!"